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The Fearless Yanks Who Spied on Hitler

by Joseph E. Persico

Fred Mayer sits today in his neat retirement home overlooking the gentle green rises of West Virginia. At 57, he is still a trim, muscular man with a genial manner and flashing smile. Thirty-four years ago, Mayer, a Jewish refugee from Nazi terror, was parachuting from a B-24 onto an alpine glacier to become one of the most successful American spies inside Hitler's Reich.

Fred Mayer's exploits form part of a still essentially untold espionage triumph of World War II: the penetration of the Third Reich by over 200 American spies, largely during the last year of the war. These missions were carried off by agents of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), predecessor of today's CIA. Until 1976, the official account of these usually successful, often heroic, occasionally bizarre and sometimes tragic operations were locked up in the archives of the CIA.

Previously, numerous books, articles and movies have acquainted Americans with OSS successes in placing agents inside Nazi-occupied countries, such as France, Italy, Belgium and Norway. But the idea of secret agents jumping out of planes to serve as spies directly inside the most ruthless and efficient police state ever known was a story begging to be told.

I requested that the CIA declassify and release the files on these operations. What emerged was an account of a pervasive, boldly executed infiltration of every militarily significant zone and city within Hitler's Reich by America's secret operatives.

One of the first surprises was the many Americans involved in these operations who later distinguished themselves in other areas. Former Su-

sador Arthur J. Goldberg was an OSS major who helped place agents with labor backgrounds inside Germany. Mike Burke, later the president of the New York Yankees and head of Madison Square Garden, went to England to help organize the dropping of agents into the enemy homeland. Richard Helms, a generation before becoming director of the CIA, worked on the OSS German Desk. Henry Morgan, grandson of financier J. P. Morgan, was involved in collecting the clothes and in counterfeiting documents that the agents used.

What kind of spy carried out these infiltrations? Initially, OSS feared that Americans, even if fluent in German, would have too little knowledge of daily life to pass successfully inside the Reich. German POW's who professed to be anti-Hitler were possibilities, but the turncoat is always suspect. German refugee Communists were genuinely anti-Nazi but politically risky. OSS had to make compromises and, in the end, used all three categories. Frenchmen, Belgians, Poles and other Europeans were also recruited because they could pass as conscript laborers.

From the outset, British intelligence officials had been pessimistic that secret agents could survive inside Germany without a resistance base. Our ally thus sought to discourage the American plans, and the British made only modest efforts themselves to penetrate the Reich. But Gen. William "Wild Bill" Donovan, the dauntless father of OSS, was eager to have his young intelligence organization inside Germany.

Every effort was made to prepare the likeliest agents with the most cred-

Clothes were bought off the backs of refugees who had fled Germany. Skilled printers, engravers and commercial artists, drawn from top magazines and the Federal Bureau of Engraving and Printing, were sent to OSS in London to counterfeit ID's, travel permits, ration cards and other documents used in Germany. Cover stories were memorized down to such details as the graveyard in which an agent's "father" was buried and the color of buses in his "hometown"—just the kinds of questions which Gestapo interrogators were known to ask.

Fred Mayer and two other agents, after landing at over 10,000 feet in the Stubaier Alps, worked their way into Innsbruck, where Fred fed a steady stream of intelligence on German movements through the key Brenner Pass to U.S. 15th Air Force bombers. Mayer was later caught and tortured by the Gestapo but never talked.

The team code-named HAMMER made the most daring flight, directly from London to Berlin, where they parachuted just outside the German capital. Thereafter, HAMMER provided intelligence on the operation of power plants, tank factories and railroad marshaling yards to 8th Air Force raiders through an ingenious device called "Joan-Eleanor"—a communications system invented for our German operations that enabled the agent on the ground to converse through a tiny radio with airplanes seven miles above Berlin.

America's most successful spies inside Germany came out of Switzerland and were directed by Allen Dulles, who later went on to head the CIA. Three of his agents contributed to intelligence revealing the secret